Chapter V: Conclusions

The saying “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” attributed to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (*Metaphysics,* Book 8) and adopted by Gestalt theory, means that a whole has a greater, deeper, and broader value than the sum of its parts considered separately. The interaction and context that exist in the parts is what counts; it is this that yields the holistic picture of a phenomenon. In this study, too, one sees how the totality of the conclusions—factual, conceptual, or applied—constructs our understanding of the topic of this study, the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth. In the study, the phenomenon of future orientation and occupational aspirations of teens who leave school was investigated by means of three main questions. The conclusions are presented below in the order of the research questions.

5.1 Factual conclusions

5.1.1 Factual conclusions from Research Question 1: How do dropout youth perceive their future and do they have a future orientation?

On the basis of the first research question, one may say that the young people investigated in the study do have a future orientation. They knew how to define it clearly in certain categories and allude to it vaguely in others. Thus, the conclusion is that most dropout youth orient themselves to the future along a dialectic continuum from having such an orientation to not having one, with reference to the near term standing in contrast to attention to the long run. These young people expressed their future orientation by means of categories harvested from various areas of life and corresponding to their particular point of view as youth who dropped out of school. Thus, when they referred to, or spoke in the context of, the establishment of a family, their future orientation was less clear and defined, evidently reflecting the complex difficulties that beset their nuclear families in the present.

In the scholastic context, most participants found it hard to see themselves partaking of higher academic studies; accordingly, they perceived this aspiration as something hard to attain. However, they did envisage participating in short-term focused studies. In the specific context of military service—the next stage in Israeli youngsters’ future after they finish school—the participants’ attitude toward this imminent future appeared to be seen opaquely and indefinitely, most likely due to fear and absence of motivation to enlist in the army and do meaningful service. In contrast to the vagueness that emerged in this part of the interview, future place of residence was strongly emphasized; here the future orientation was perceived as the possibility of change and social mobility.

As they sorted their remarks into categories of areas of life, the participants expressed emotions, beliefs, and coping with obstacles to their future. In this manner, they demonstrated that the future orientation of dropout youth is influenced by their ability or inability to express a broad ambit of emotions. The more emotions the participants expressed—fear, concern, or hope—the more able they were to define and relate to the future. Much the same was found in regard to their ability to express faith in themselves, grounded in optimistic thoughts about life. For dropout youth, future orientation serves not only as an idea or an ideal about life but also as a way to promote personal steadfastness and resilience and mitigate risk behaviors in the present.

5.1.2 Factual conclusions from Research Question 2: What are the occupational aspirations of dropout youth?

The conclusions harvested from the responses to Research Question 2 focus on the realization that (1) there is a strong connection between young people’s personal life experiences and their choice of occupational aspirations and (2) they perceive these aspirations as matters of social and economic value, through which they will be able to position themselves differently in the future. The occupational aspirations that the young people chose, in both of the research tools, belong to different and diverse vocational demands, mainly computers, sports, and psychology. Most of the inspirations centered on intentional study, but not necessarily formal study, for the acquisition of a trade. This emphasizes the gap between the wish to engage in a certain occupation and fear of higher formal studies. In the gender context, the participants’ occupational aspirations were gender-biased—different among girls than among boys. The conclusion is that the gender distribution of dropout youth is no different from that of women and men in society at large.

Another point of reference concerns the discrepancy between the positive and normative occupational aspirations of dropout youth in various fields and the entrenched conceptions among the professional teams at the Youth Advancement Units, and also among most studies, that dropout youth have no occupational aspirations and, insofar as they have any, they are weak and of criminal or negative nature. The conclusion is that this discrepancy reflects stereotypes about dropout youth and labels them as weak and deficient in horizons, dreams, and aspirations. The distance between the findings and the stereotypes impedes these teams in acting on their responsibility for developing future orientation and positive and normative occupational aspirations in these young people.

5.1.3 Factual conclusions from Research Question 3: What psycho-social elements are involved in the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth?

Given the participants’ responses to the third research question, one may say, first, that each of the disciplines, sociology and psychology, has an impact on the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth. However, the sociological effects cannot be clearly separated from the psychological ones. Furthermore, the holistic picture in regard to them is one of interrelations and intereffects. The dominant sociological elements are parental influence, school influence, the very fact of dropping out, and meaningful role models in the young people’s lives. The dominant psychological elements are self-concept and self-orientation in the three dimensions of time (past-present-future), self-image and self-concept, recent processes of change undergone, how these processes affected their way of viewing the future, and experiences. By implication, these young people perceive their future orientation and occupational aspirations as associated with their relations with parents and families. Namely, the more intimate and cohesive the participants’ relationship is, the clearer and more focused are their future orientation and occupational aspirations. Similarly, the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth depend on parents’ employment and the family’s economic situation and are based on a promotive and structured discourse between young people and their parents on the topic of the future. The conclusion to draw from this is that in order to encourage such a discourse, parents’ consciousness of the importance of future orientation and its significance in adolescence should be enhanced.

The findings of the research show that school also has a definitive influence on the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth. Here the experience of dropping out, one that includes pain and suffering and is perceived as traumatic, is the most dominant. The main impact has to do with the adverse two-way relationship between school and adolescents before they drop out, one that affects their intellectual, personal, and social development. Accordingly, the occupational aspirations and future orientation of dropout youth depend on the role of the scholastic setting in the development and formation of their personal identity, not only in the present but also going forward, and on preparation for and transition from school to the adult world generally and the world of work particularly. Another sociological element that influences the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth is the role models that surround the lives of these young people, including family members, employers, business and occupational mentors, and individuals of similar background.

The conclusions to draw from these observations are that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are shaped through the mediation of family members who serve as role models. For dropout youth from single-parent families, older siblings serve in this capacity. Additional role models are employers and occupational mentors who serve as significant figures in dropouts’ lives. The youngsters see them as important sources for study and development, foremost in identifying an occupational aspiration. In addition, the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are very strongly shaped by role models whose biographies resemble theirs.

In view of the psychological elements that share in the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth, one may understand that these two fields are influenced by the integration of the self into the three dimensions of time as an important factor in building young people’s personal identity. The more adept such adolescents are at defining themselves via the three dimensions of time, the more able they are to construct a positive and well-rounded future. Self-image and self-concept also influence future orientation and occupational aspirations. Particularly in regard to their identity as pupils, the participants displayed poor self-image and self-concept and these factors had the effect of devaluing occupational aspirations and causing ideal aspirations to change to realistic ones. By implication, the self-image of the dropout youth should be strengthened so that they may establish a strong occupational aspiration. Another conclusion sets the young people’s process of personal change within the framework of the educational-therapeutic work that they do at the Youth Advancement Units—a process that promotes psychological well-being, bolsters self-confidence, and emphasizes strengths as a critical impetus for the concretization of their future orientation and occupational aspirations. Another psychological element in developing future orientation and occupational aspirations is the very existence of personal experiences, particularly those related to the world of work. These experiences give young people broader exposure, greater familiarity, and more knowledge of various occupations in this world and help them to develop a broad spectrum of skills that promote self-capacity and ability to believe that they can aspire to, and attain, future goals. These experiences are also meaningful for the formation of personal identity in adolescence.

The most significant conclusion to draw for the purposes of this study, without doubt, is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth depend on the profile of these young people and their specific patterns of dropping out. Accordingly, uniformity among members of this population group cannot be found. The characteristics of the dropout population are changing in ways that differ from the traditional perceptions that have been conventional wisdom thus far—creating a whole set of new understandings about the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth in Israel.

5.2 Conceptual conclusions

At the conceptual level, the research findings suggest that an integrative model of future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth may be put forward on the basis of the data gathered in this study. The figure below presents this model:

Conceptualization Model

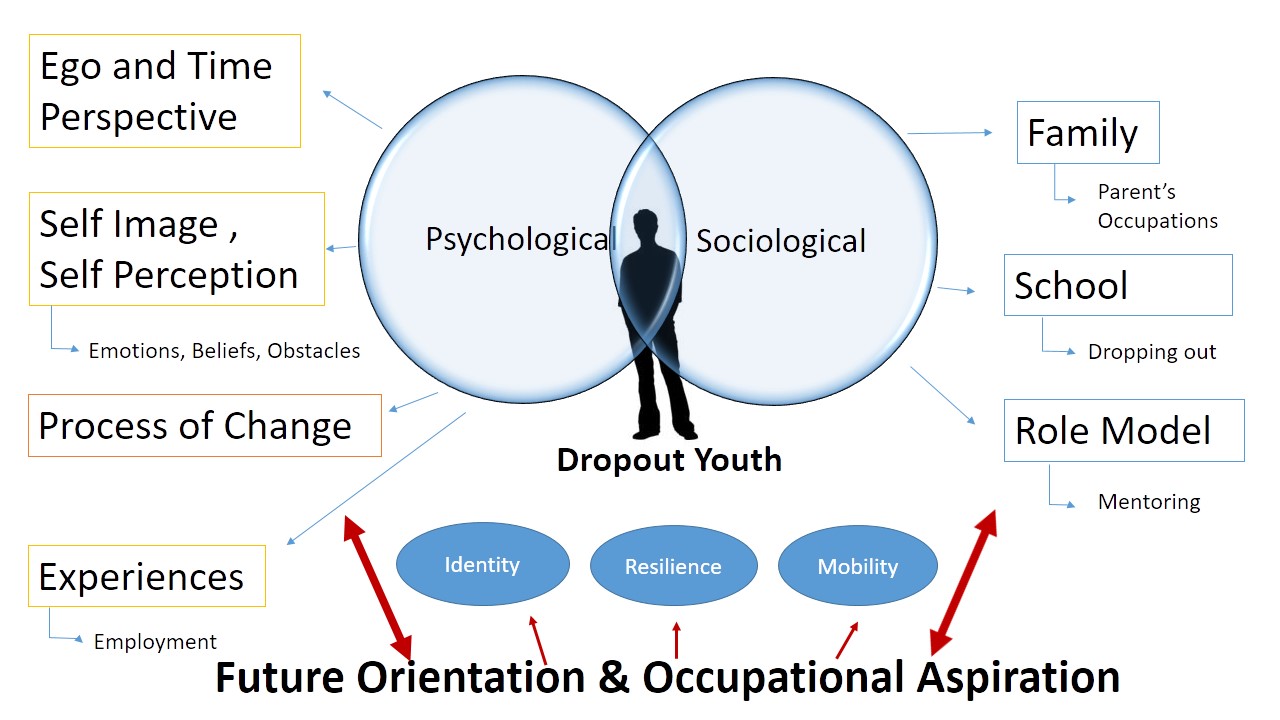


Figure: Integrative Model of Future Orientation and Occupational Aspirations of Dropout Youth in Israel (IMFAOA DY)

The IMFAOA DY model presents the contexts and intereffects of the concepts that surfaced in the discussion of the findings; it also elicits a broad picture of the phenomenon of future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth in Israel. The most salient concepts in the field of sociology are parents, with family structure and parents’ employment central, and the school, centering on the dropout experience and the concept of role model—a concept that arose repeatedly in the interviews, focusing on the mentoring processes that the participants experienced. The most conspicuous concepts in the psychological field are the self from the perspective of time; self-image and self-concept and their relationship with emotions, beliefs, and capacity to cope with obstacles; change as an essential process in personal development; and “experiences” and their importance for the development of future orientation and occupational aspirations. The sociological and psychological elements are perceptibly intertwined and influence each other in regard to these matters. An example is the influence of parents and, particularly, parental employment on adolescents’ future orientation and occupational aspirations. Another example, perhaps a stronger one, is the impact of parents on these young people’s self-image and self-concept. Self-image and self-concept directly affect occupational aspirations in such a way that where self-image is poor, a strong occupational aspiration is devalued to a weak one.

Another example connects the school and the dropout experience with adolescents’ self-image and self-concept, with special emphasis on their self-concept as students in the present and the future. This nexus ties into choices of occupational aspirations that are geared not to formal academic studies in the future but to autodidactic short-term learning. In another example, personal experiences, foremost in employment, develop skills and personal capacity and, by so doing, promote self-image and self-concept. However, they are also associated with the mentoring work of employers and occupational mentors whom adolescents perceive as role models.

An additional conceptual conclusion may be drawn from the contexts that link the time perspective of the young people and the three dimensions of time—past, present, and future—with the process of self-integration, one that propels the formation of personal identity as a critical task in adolescence. This process also denotes self-induced change in young people not only in the transition from childhood to adulthood, i.e., from past to present, but also, and mainly, at the psychological and behavioral levels and in the realization that past behaviors, particularly risk behaviors, also affect the future, meaning that their future depends on making this change. The relationship between the sociological and the psychological elements affects future orientation and occupational aspirations. Amazingly, however, a feedback process exists because the very act of thinking about the future leads to the internal concretization of additional concepts and allows progress to take place in new elements of importance for adolescents’ psychological and social development.

Thus, one may see how future orientation promotes the concept of “resilience” as a quality that mitigates anxiety and depression and, in turn, prevents risk behaviors. Similarly, the concept of “identity,” invoked by thinking about the future, takes shape and fine-tunes itself, thereby strengthening self- confidence, self-image, and self-concept. Future orientation connects with the concept of “mobility” to create room for change in a physical, economic, or social place and assure a different place in life. The effectuation of these concepts in the lives of dropout youth will allow them to develop powerfully in the emotional, personal, and social senses, generating and internalizing optimistic and positive thoughts about themselves and the possibility of change, thereby enabling them to stride toward a better future.

5.3 Practical implications and recommendations

The practical implications of this study and the recommendations that flow from them, in the context of future orientation and occupational aspirations, are divided into two levels: those related to the development of the individuals in question (dropout youth) and those associated with the responsibility of the organizational setting to which these young people belong, the Youth Advancement Department of the Ministry of Education.

1. Practical implications for the educational-therapeutic staff at the level of personal development

a. To develop future orientation and occupational aspirations among dropout youth, individualized or group educational-therapeutic work that aims to attain these goals is needed. This work includes:

— working through the dropout experience and its accompanying feelings of pain and suffering;

* creating a process of guidance through which dropout youth can elucidate their goals and objectives and identify future possibilities in respect of family, home, education, and employment;
* devising a personal intervention program that includes reinforcement of self-image and self-concept, particularly in respect of learning ability and capacity;
* developing an understanding of the context in which actions in the present (for better or worse) affect personal future, in a way that will bolster personal resilience and prevent risk behaviors.

b. A relevant and personally tailored education and vocational-training program that will promote occupational aspiration should be devised, and diverse vocational-training activities that will allow participants to experience various occupations should be offered.

c. A process is needed that will prepare dropout youth for integration into the world of work, including:

— familiarization with the twenty-first-century world of work and the future of its occupations;

* revealing a broad range of occupations and broadening the ambit of opportunities in each occupation while detecting personal preferences and making adjustments;
* detecting barriers and obstacles to the fulfillment of the occupational aspiration and finding ways of coping with them;
* integrating into, and finding a place in, the world of work as an arena for hands-on occupational experiences, with stewarding by occupational mentors in various vocational fields.

d. A process of intervention with parents of dropout youth needs to be built, including:

— familiarizing and exposing parents to the characteristics of the twenty-first-century world of work;

* developing positive channels of communication between these adolescents and their parents;
* enhancing parents’ awareness of the importance of future orientation and occupational aspirations in adolescence and encouraging parents to engage their children in such a discourse.

2. Conclusions relating to the responsibility of the organizational setting:

a. Change the stereotyped thinking patterns of the professional teams at the Youth Advancement Units as to the existence of future orientation and occupational aspirations among the dropout youth under their care. As a corollary, the importance of developing the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth needs to be understood.

b. Adopt and assimilate the theoretical framework as a basis for understanding the phenomenon of future orientation and occupational aspirations among dropout youth.

c. Concretize the policies of those who deal with dropout youth for the advancement of these young people’s future orientation and occupational aspirations, including:

— articulating a comprehensive working concept and assimilation processes;

* producing written educational-therapeutic intervention plans;
* integrating the development of future orientation and occupational aspirations into the overall activity of settings that interact with dropout youth;
* creating an array of training and in-service activities for the professional teams in order to assimilate the foregoing.

d. Identify future occupational trends in the twenty-first-century employment world and devise study programs that are relevant to this world and are tailored to dropout youth.

e. Develop models for the integration of dropout youth into the world of work and establish relations with employers and occupational mentors in order to promote these young people’s occupational aspirations.

f. Provide counseling, support, and stewarding for the advancement of initiatives based on the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth.

Apart from the personal and organizational implications, several additional practical implications came to light:

3. The phenomenon of dropout youth who acquire knowledge of desired future occupations and even try out these occupations in the present may bode well for the development of education among members of this population. By devising an innovative pedagogical concept, they may be given the ability to learn autonomously by means of online and up-to-date tools that are tailored to twenty-first-century pedagogy.

4. The young people who were interviewed symbolize the change that has taken place in the characteristics of the population served by Youth Advancement. The system should be aware of this and should adjust its therapeutic or scholastic intervention programs to a broader range of young people who have different dropout characteristics.

5.4 Limitations of the study

This study, like any study, has several limitations. They relate to the choice of its qualitative methodology, based on grounded theory, and to the research tools, the specific research population, and researcher’s position in the research field. They are explained below:

1. Limitations in the context of methodology

Qualitative research proposes to examine, investigate, and probe a given social phenomenon and seek out the meanings and the largest number of aspects and contexts of the phenomenon in question. It also tries to understand reality through the research participants’ eyes and strongly emphasizes the researcher’s interpretation in understanding this reality. Consequently, a limitation may exist if the researcher is not fully able to access and interview the subjects best suited to the study. In the case at hand, however, the researcher’s access to all of the Youth Advancement Units and, in turn, the dropout youth was ample due to her capacity as a national employment facilitator and a member of the Youth Advancement Department staff.

Another limitation associated with the research methodology was that in qualitative research, the investigation of individual cases and the subjectivity of the interpretation of the phenomenon limit the ability of the study to generalize. This makes one ask whether the number of participants researched was large enough to represent the entire population being studied. In response to this limitation, this study invoked various methods to broaden its angles of observation and to triangulate in order to create a basis for its validity and credibility. The response included the use of three research tools (interviews, focus groups, and analysis of documents). Furthermore, the researcher was continually aware of this issue and put reflective processes in place in designing and carrying out the study, understanding its outcomes, and creating the requisite theoretical framework and boundaries. In addition, a study based on grounded theory is validated in a process of continual comparison of the categories that arise from the analysis of the interview data with the data yielded by the document analysis. Triangulation was also applied in the analysis of the data through comparison of sociology and psychology, i.e., interdisciplinary triangulation.

An additional limitation in the context of the research methodology was present: To generate a correct research perspective, a study based on grounded theory requires more research time and greater accuracy in theoretical sampling, coding of the data, and comparison of the categories. However, grounded theory was the right choice for the topic of the study, the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth.

1. Limitations associated with the research population

The research population chosen for this study was composed of dropout youth who receive care from the Youth Advancement Units. Among the groups that receive this care, those chosen were non-religious Jewish adolescents. The first limitation that arises from this choice is that it omits the rest of the treated groups and, accordingly, presents only one aspect of the research topic. Furthermore, the population chosen is considered the strongest of the groups of young people treated. Another limitation concerns the interviews as such. Interviews of adolescents may embody an implicit stance of supremacy and authority that may mar the authenticity of the data that the young interviewees give, particularly when those in question are dropouts whose biographies include clashes with adult authority figures. To induce the participants to be as forthcoming as possible, the researcher had to use techniques of outreach and creation of contact in the first few minutes of the interview. The participants were told in no uncertain terms that they had the right not to answer any question that they did not wish to answer and to stop the interview at any given time. They were also strongly advised that the details they would report would be kept in total confidence for two reasons. One is the very that they are interview subjects; the other is their being clients of the Youth Advancement Units and the maintenance of confidentiality is one of the strictest rules of the profession. It was also made clear to them that in the writing of this thesis, their particulars would be modified and all research material relating to them would be destroyed at the end of the study.

Another limitation concerned the limited verbal abilities of at-risk youth, who typically struggle to express themselves and having poor and limited linguistic tools—on top of their fitting the profile of generation-Z youngsters who are accustomed to using icons instead of words. The researcher responded to this limitation by accommodating it during the interviews and availing herself of documents that elicit future orientation by means of non-verbal tools such as an illustration, as demonstrated in the analysis of the Reshatot and Shehakim programs (Appendix \_\_\_).

A third limitation of this type is related to the selection of young people for interviewing. Those in charge of the Youth Advancement Units were asked to choose the interviewees on the basis of guidelines from the researcher and in accordance with the theoretical sampling. Given that it was the units’ managers who selected the participants, a bias may have occurred in that those chosen were the strongest, the most cooperative, and the most verbal youngsters as well as those best known to the Unit, it being presumed that they went through some kind of preliminary process. To counter this limitation, the researcher had to give maximum attention to the profile of these young people in order find commonalities and dissimilarities among them and determine rule and exception.

1. Limitations associated with the researcher’s position in the research field

Reference to the researcher’s position in the research field of this study denotes her proximity and identity with the research field. Indeed, the researcher is deeply familiar with the field and has years of experience in it due to her capacity as national employment facilitator and a member of the staff of the Education Ministry’s Youth Advancement Department. This familiarity gives her an advantage in terms of access to the research population, the participants’ availability, and access to the documents that were analyzed. This advantage, however, may also be a drawback and a limitation in that this prior knowledge includes assimilated outlooks and entrenched opinions about the research field and the participants. This may prevent cognitive openness and the discovery of new contents or new contexts. To prevent those outcomes, the researcher undertook to be mindful of this limitation at every stage of the study and to downplay her knowledge in her encounters with the participants, especially in view of the grounded theory method used. However, one cannot ignore one’s theoretical knowledge and go into the field as a tabula rasa, particularly in our era of continual availability of information. Accordingly, the researcher’s position has to be one that puts theory aside and allows the study to be driven by the text itself, as given over by the participants. Apart from the researcher’s specific position, there are natural biases vis-à-vis the research population, which differs from that of the researcher in terms of culture, ethnicity, gender, and age. Therefore, continual awareness of these biases is the name of the game.

5.5 Contribution of the study to knowledge

The contribution of study is reflected in several matters:

1. Even though most existing studies (Chen & Vazsonyi, 2013; Worrell & Hale, 2001; Hatala et al., 2017; Nurmi, 1991) insist that at-risk youth do not have a future orientation, the present study shows that the dropout youth treated by the Youth Advancement Units do have such an orientation as well as occupational aspirations, even if these orientations and aspirations span a spectrum from clear and specific to amorphous and vague. Future orientation finds expression in various junctions of the life cycle, each receiving specific reference in accordance with the individual participant’s outlook. This study allowed its participants to express their unique voice in these contexts with maximum authenticity. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, it is the first study of its type that relates to dropout youth treated by the Youth Advancement Units. Therefore, it eliminates a lacuna in knowledge of this field and is presented here as innovative and original.

2. As for its contribution to theoretical knowledge, the study presents a new integrative theoretical model—IMFAOADY—with which the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth may be examined and observed. Looking into the sociological and psychological effects on future orientation and occupational aspirations, the study found a set of mutually influential interrelations between the disciplines. The data yielded a matrix that accommodates various concepts both in sociology (for example, the influence of parents and family and school and, central in the school context, the dropping-out experience and role models) and in psychology (e.g., construction of the self, self-image, and self-concept, the process of change, and the arena of experiences) that are dominant in the construction and sustaining of the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth. In addition, this study fine-tuned our understanding of the materiality of future orientation in the construction of adolescents’ personal identity and the promotion of resilience and well-being that are critical in preventing risk behaviors among dropout youth. In this respect, the study sheds additional light on the contexts of future orientation (Seginer, 1995, 2001, 2003; Cinnamon & Rich, 2004; Nurmi, 1991), career development (Brown , 2002; Lent & Brown, 2013; Patton & McMahon, 2001, 2014; Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2018), occupational aspirations (Gottferdson, 1981; Rojewski, 1995; Bartlett & Domene, 2015) and dropout youth (Lahav, 2000; Romi,2007).

3. At the practical level, basing itself on the IMFAOADY theoretical model, the study proposes a change in the policies of the Youth Advancement Units, one that would consider future orientation and occupational aspirations an important element in the units’ work. The applied model that was developed in this study may provide practical guidelines for the integration of these fields into the units’ work and may develop among these adolescents personal well-being, optimism, and construction of personal identity, all of which are critical for their sound development and may enhance their ability to think about the future and to plan and implement their aspirations. At the present writing, pursuant to the results of the study, the Youth Advancement Department has set up a special committee to install future orientation as a core element in the programs and activities of the Youth Advancement Units countrywide.

4. Another contribution of the study concerns the composition of the population served by the Youth Advancement Department and the way the professional teams perceive it. The study reveals the existence of different patterns of dropping out that attest to change in the population of dropout youth that the units serve. The population today is different from, and more diverse in its characteristics than, the population that was familiar until several years ago. However, the perceptions held by the professional teams that treat these young people, as well as those of most researchers, still relate to a certain type of population; accordingly, they are influenced by stereotyped outlooks that do not correspond to the changing reality. Even though this matter was not central in the study, it affects the teams’ ability to believe that dropout youth have a future orientation and that it is their job to help these youngsters to progress toward it. In other words, the model developed in this study may induce change in the perception of educational-therapeutic staff in regard to the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth in Israel.

5. In the universal context, the presence of adolescents and young adults in the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population is an acute issue worldwide, as growing numbers of people in these age groups find themselves outside these settings due to lack of proper schooling and inability to adjust to the changing world of work. The IMFAOADY model that was developed in this study, as well as the practical implications presented, may enable members of this population to rebuild their occupational aspirations and develop a future orientation that can propel them forward in personal and social terms. Intervention programs that include practice and activities for the development of future orientation may be suitable for a variety of educational settings that treat dropout youth.

5.6 Continuing research

This study marks only the beginning of attention to the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth. Accordingly, much continuing research is needed:

1. The study should be expanded to a larger number of adolescents in comprehensive quantitative research.
2. The study should be expanded to other population groups of dropout youth who are served by the Youth Investment Units, such as Arabs, Ultra-Orthodox, those of Ethiopian origin, and former-Soviet.
3. The study should be expanded with an in-depth investigation of the gender aspect—the difference between boys and girls—in the context of future orientation and occupational aspirations.
4. Action studies on the quality of intervention programs that promote future orientation and occupational aspirations should be performed.
5. Exploratory research on the variance in characteristics of dropout youth and different patterns of dropping out in today’s era is needed.